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The Frankfurt School and the Authoritarian Personality: Balance Sheet of an Insight

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ABSTRACT:

(200 words)

Frankfurt School Critical Theory is perhaps the most significant theory of society to have developed directly from a research programme focused on the critique of political authoritarianism, as it manifested during the interwar decades of the twentieth century. The Frankfurt School's analysis of the persistent roots—and therefore the perennial nature—of what it describes as the 'authoritarian personality,' remains influential in the analysis of authoritarian populism in the contemporary world, as evidenced by several recent studies. Yet the tendency in these studies is to reference the final formulation of the category, as expressed in Theodor Adorno and cothinkers' *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), as if this were a theoretical readymade that can be unproblematically inserted into a measured assessment of the threat to democracy posed by current authoritarian trends. It is high time that the theoretical commitments and political stakes in the category of the authoritarian personality are re-evaluated, in light of the evolution of the Frankfurt School. In this paper, I review the classical theories of the authoritarian personality, arguing that two quite different versions of the theory—one characterological, the other psychodynamic—can be extracted from Frankfurt School research.

KEYWORDS:

Authoritarianism, Adorno, Frankfurt School, Critical Theory, psychoanalysis

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(6,000 words)

Research into the nature and spread of fascism in the period from the 1930s to the 1950s led the foremost members of the Frankfurt School to formulate theories of the authoritarian personality and fascist propaganda that have become standard references. Although the leading members of the Frankfurt School, such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, were not able at the time to work out a robust formulation of their theory, the authoritarian personality is nonetheless an important discovery in political psychology. Today it has become a crucial point of departure in discussions of the resurgence of authoritarian populism and the rise of the neo-fascist right (or "Alt-Right"). Yet the concept of the authoritarian personality, particularly as elaborated in the signature work on the topic, Adorno and cothinkers' *Studies in Prejudice, Volume I: The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), needs further examination. The articulation of the theory in the 1950s was strongly connected with a sweeping denunciation of modern society, as an "administered world" with totalitarian potentials. To this end, work on the authoritarian personality was inflected by Adorno and Horkheimer in the direction of a "philosophical anthropology of bourgeois Man," whose intention was to demonstrate that modern individuals are latent authoritarians. The notion that the majority of modern individuals have personality structures that involve "repressed" forms of the "sado-masochistic character," typical of fascism, may have resonated with some of the bleak theses in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947). But it is unlikely that most contemporary researchers into the resurgence of authoritarian populism are prepared to uncritically accept such theoretical commitments today.

I contend that in the long march from *Studies in the Family and Authority* (1936) to *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), Frankfurt School researchers tended to lose contact with the original research question of the 1920s. That problematic was not exclusively focused on the authoritarian personalities who populated the ranks of the fascist cadre organisations, but was also directed to the urgent question of the prospects for success of fascist propaganda. Initial findings from the empirical studies done under the auspices of the Institute for Social Research indicated, not a vast reservoir of pliant drones whose latent programming led them to patiently await an activation statement from the fascist master, but significant ambivalence towards authoritarian attitudes. In the work of Erich Fromm in particular, the aim of the social psychology that the Institute developed was to grasp character structure as a socially-conditioned repertoire of coping mechanisms that might, under crisis conditions, be overwhelmed. The category of "regression," rather than "repression," was invoked to explain how individuals, in the presence of such trigger conditions, might become susceptible to the infantile and irrational aspects of fascist propaganda. Accordingly, I intend to contrast the late-stage articulation of the theory of the authoritarian personality with the original research question, and to compare the final philosophical anthropology with the

original psycho-dynamic theoretical framework. I conclude that the category of the authoritarian personality makes a valuable contribution to understanding the resurgence of political extremism today. But I argue that this is only when it is interpreted through a psychodynamic, rather than a philosophical-anthropological, framework.

THE CLASSICAL FORMULATION

The (henceforth “classical”) Frankfurt School theories of the nature of fascist politics, the authoritarian personality and the way that fascist propaganda works are most influentially articulated in Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) and surrounding works, especially Adorno’s sections of *Studies in Prejudice I: The Authoritarian Personality* (1950). The four volumes of *Studies in Prejudice* were sponsored by the American Jewish Committee’s Department of Scientific Research and led by a team of Berkeley-based researchers, including Theodor Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswick, Nevitt Sanford and Daniel Levinson. On the basis of survey responses from 2,099 respondents, the team conducted interviews with several hundred individuals who scored highly on measures of prejudice and/or authoritarianism, with the aim of determining whether a correlation existed between proto-fascist attitudes and social prejudices, especially anti-Semitism. The study reported that it had discovered a distinct personality type—the authoritarian personality—whose illiberal social attitudes were linked to hostility towards designated out-groups, including Jews, and which posed a concerning threat to democracy. Although the authoritarian personality represented a minority of the population (less than 25%), Adorno’s sections of the report warned darkly that “personality patterns that have been dismissed as ‘pathological’ because they were not in keeping with the most common manifest trends . . . in society, have, on closer investigation, turned out to be but exaggerations of what was almost universal below the surface” (Adorno et al., 2019: 7). Prospects for neo-fascism in America under McCarthyite anti-Communism were, in other words, disturbingly good, and the sponsors were right to worry that American democracy was not immune to anti-Semitic populism.

Adorno’s formulations have become a standard reference in discussions of the resurgence of authoritarian populism today, with Peter Gordon discussing the theory in his section of *Authoritarianism: Three Inquiries in Critical Theory* (2018) and Robyn Marasco editing a special edition of *SAQ* on the authoritarian personality (117(4), 2018). The core characteristics of the authoritarian personality that are typically singled out today are reasonably well-known: authoritarian submission (i.e., unquestioning obedience), authoritarian aggression (i.e., hostility to dissent and deviance) and rigid conventionalism (i.e., moral conformity to conventional values) (Altemeyer, 1996: 6-7). As a matter of fact, however, the (celebrated or infamous) “F-scale,” used to measure authoritarian tendencies, had nine items, including “anti-introception,” or lack of cathexis (i.e., emotional coldness, lack of imagination and strict discipline); identification with power; and, superstition and stereotyping (Adorno et al., 2019: 228). Additionally, high scorers on the F-scale regarded the world as a chaotic and dangerous place, had a destructive attitude to humanity and were inclined to believe that sexual depravity was rampant in society (Adorno et al., 2019: 228). In Adorno’s subsequent reflections on the project, he suggests that the items on were based on the “Elements of Anti-Semitism” chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Adorno, 2016). The “Elements of Anti-Semitism” chapter was itself derived from the concept of the sado-masochistic character (explained in detail in a moment), the personality structure attributed to fascist attitudes (Müller-Doohm, 2009: 296). It is therefore not entirely surprising that the study detected a strong correlation between high scores on the F-scale and ethnic prejudices, especially anti-Semitism, and that Adorno would interpret this as evidence for a specific developmental trajectory.

Methodological circularity is not the only problem with the study. Adorno also routinely reduced the core authoritarian attitudes to three central characteristics—“rigidity, lack of cathexis, stereopathy” (Adorno et al., 2019: 751)—but these are manifestly different to those highlighted by contemporary researchers. The underlying reason for this emerges in the surrounding penumbra of works produced alongside *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, during, or in the aftermath of, the Second World War, such as Horkheimer’s *Eclipse of Reason* (1949), Adorno’s *Minima Moralia* (1951) and Adorno’s *Philosophy of Modern Music* (1949). As is well known, the core thesis of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* concerns the dialectical subversion of humanity by its own ego-centred, instinctually-self-preservative, instrumental rationality, which results in (contra Marx) historical scission between the tendential increase in the productive forces and radically decreasing potentials for human liberation. Central to the notion that the “Enlightenment is totalitarian” (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 4), which emerges from this position, is the idea that instrumental rationality demands, alongside social domination and the reduction of the natural environment to raw materials, the fierce repression of inner nature. “Humanity had to inflict terrible injuries on itself,” Adorno and Horkheimer write, “before the self, the identical, purpose-directed, masculine character of human beings was created, and something of this process is repeated in every childhood” (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 26). The name for these terrible injuries, it turns out, is the sado-masochistic character, described by—

yes, you guessed it—rigid (or identity) thinking (dealt with in *Eclipse*), emotional coldness (the subject of *Minima Moralia*) and primitive defense mechanisms (exhibited in the “Stravinsky” chapter of *Modern Music*).

The underlying logic of this construction of the authoritarian personality is clearly exhibited in Horkheimer’s major statement on Critical Theory and anti-Semitism, “The Jews and Europe” (1939), which articulates the background to the anti-Semitism chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Horkheimer opens the essay by declaring that “whoever wants to explain anti-Semitism must speak of National Socialism,” before shifting to the main focus, which is that “whoever is not willing to talk about capitalism should also keep quiet about fascism” (Horkheimer, 1989: 77, 78). The central thesis, then, is that “the totalitarian order differs from its bourgeois predecessor only in that it has lost its inhibitions,” or, in other words, “fascism is the truth of modern society” (Horkheimer, 1989: 78). Correlatively, the authoritarian personality is the characteristic subjectivity of the bourgeois epoch, as Horkheimer implies in “Egoism and the Freedom Movements: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Era” (1936). Discussing Freud, Horkheimer maintains that psychoanalysis shows that bourgeois society provides “social prohibitions that, under the given familial and social conditions, are suitable for arresting people’s instinctual development at a sadistic level or reverting them back to this level” (Horkheimer, 1993: 104). These social conditions are so highly general that they characterise the epoch as a whole: the “sado-masochism” of the popular masses, evident in fascism and anti-Semitism, is generated by the internalisation, through “introversion” (or identification), of social authority, which is hostile to pleasure (Horkheimer, 1993: 103). Just as fascism is the truth of modernity, then, the authoritarian personality is the dark secret of the autonomous individual, something that new developments in state capitalism and the culture industry have brought to the surface. For Adorno and Horkheimer, and cothinkers such as Herbert Marcuse, such proto-fascist personalities represented a new anthropological type, emergent in a postwar social context that opposed neo-fascism to communism. This global confrontation had the implication that America might soon turn openly fascist—hence the urgency of the Berkeley project that generated *The Authoritarian Personality* (Wiggershaus, 1994: 388).

DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY

The hidden key to Adorno’s contributions to *The Authoritarian Personality*, then, is the social theory whose definitive articulation is provided by *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, with its paradoxical thesis that fascism is the “rebellion of nature” against repression (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 152; Horkheimer, 1974: 123). The guiding systematic thesis of *Dialectic* is that economics, politics, culture and psychology form a seamless functional totality that has, in important respects, broken free from classical dynamics involving capitalist contradictions. Under the dominance of “instrumental reason,” a sort of technocratic collectivism has emerged to become a new social formation that they describe as a rationally planned “administered world,” with democratic, fascist and socialist variants (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: xi-xii, 235). Although Adorno and Horkheimer stop short of announcing that the administered society is post-capitalist, they do regard its suppression of class struggle and crisis tendencies as effectively permanent (Abromeit, 2011: 394-424). The main development facilitating authoritarian social formations is the transformation of reason into a faculty for formal calculations that can—as they argue in the chapter on morality—be applied to irrational and immoral ends. In the dialectic of enlightenment, the domination of nature dialectically turns against the wielders of instrumental reason, returning as social domination, so that modern society is rationally planned but globally irrational. The role of the culture industry is to provide substitute satisfactions capable of offsetting the instinctual repression (the postponement of pleasure, and, indeed, the infliction of suffering) involved in economics and politics. The culture industry’s manipulation adapts the individual to a formally-rational, technocratic civilization, one whose ends involve the subjection of the individual to society as a reified totality which appears as a terrifying “second nature”.

Meanwhile, fascism acts as a release valve when the renunciation of instinctual satisfactions becomes intolerable, involving the projection onto designated out-groups of “socially tabooed impulses” that are repressed in the individual. “Under the pressure of the superego,” they write, “the ego projects aggressive urges emanating from the id which, through their strength, are a danger to itself, as malign intentions onto the outside world, and succeeds in ridding itself of them as reactions to that outside world, either in fantasy, by identification with the alleged malefactor, or in reality, by ostensible self-defense” (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 158). Fascism, Adorno and Horkheimer remind the reader repeatedly, is not simply the return of repressed *nature*, but the return of *repressed* nature, that is, libido twisted by aggression and split off from the ego, and projected onto the other. Accordingly, fascism awakens an impulse to violent sensuality and sensualised

violence, “neither unsublimated nor regressive libido, but intellectual pleasure in regression, *amor intellectualis diaboli*; the joy of destroying civilization with its own weapons” (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 74).

On this interpretation, the chapter on “*Juliette*, or, Enlightenment and Morality,” which reads Kant with Sade, is the centrepiece of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The argument is that formal morality is consistent with substantive immorality, because it involves the imposition of logical consistency on arbitrary contents. The choice of Sade to demonstrate this thesis is motivated by the idea that the Enlightenment superego is sadistic in its excessive enforcement of the rules, while the modern ego is masochistic in its submission to the superegoic repression of nature. Accordingly, the Enlightenment is not only “totalitarian,” but also “perverse,” because the repression of nature twists sexuality into guilt and shame, with the paradoxical result that domination and submission become sexualised (because “dirty”) (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 79, 85, 89). As John Abromeit notes, in his study of Horkheimer, “Erich Fromm’s analysis of the sadomasochistic character begins with a discussion of the same mechanism that Horkheimer placed in the centre of his analysis of the bourgeois character, namely ... the psychoanalytic concept of the superego”. Abromeit adds that “Fromm’s analysis of the sadomasochistic character structure ... was an important theoretical source for Horkheimer’s concept of bourgeois anthropology” (Abromeit, 2011: 282-283). Consequently, just as the administered society is latently totalitarian in democratic, fascist and communist variants, so too, the modern individual is latently both authoritarian and submissive to authority, and always potentially prejudiced.

The logic at work in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* involves the inflation of a category from social psychology—the sadomasochistic character—whose intended scope extends to about 10% of the population, to the underlying structure of the bourgeois individual as such. Adorno’s contribution to *The Authoritarian Personality* is a prolongation of this tendency, which involves a philosophical anthropology that aims to correlate capitalist society with psychic structuration, through a global description of bourgeois subjectivity. Indeed, Adorno’s introduction to *The Authoritarian Personality* was drafted while he and Horkheimer were writing-up the final version of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and his remarks are entirely consistent with the finished version of the chapters on morality and anti-Semitism. Adorno’s central claim is that although the authoritarians identified by the F-scale in the study constituted a tiny minority of the survey population, they nonetheless represent the typical character structure of the bourgeois epoch. Adorno thinks that the socially normative resolution of the Oedipus Complex involves a family environment of emotional coldness, a disciplinarian father and distant mother, and an atmosphere of obedience to arbitrary rules (Adorno et al., 2019: 751).

“The subject achieves his own social adjustment only by taking pleasure in obedience and subordination. ... The pattern ... is ... a specific resolution of the Oedipus Complex ... Love for the mother comes under a severe taboo. The resulting hatred against the father is transformed by reaction-formation into love. This transformation leads to a particular kind of superego. ... In the psychodynamics of the ‘authoritarian character,’ part of the preceding aggressiveness is absorbed and turned into masochism, while another part is left over as sadism, which seeks an outlet in those with whom the subject does not identify: ultimately, the outgroup” (Adorno et al., 2019: 759).

The result is a sadomasochistic personality structure that Adorno locates most directly in the middle strata (especially the traditional petit-bourgeoisie), but argues has “a real mass base” well beyond the intermediate layers (Adorno et al., 2019: 759). Characteristics of the F-Scale involving rigid conventionalism, submission to authority and hostility to out-groups (“rigidity, lack of cathexis, stereopathy” (Adorno et al., 2019: 751)) can be linked, via the idea of a sado-masochistic personality structure, to regressive ideation (magical thinking, mythical beliefs) and to paranoid projections (involving projected hostility and phantasmatic persecution). The character syndrome of the authoritarian personality involves ego weakness and the introjection of—rather than identification with—the paternal imago, as the basis for a harsh superego, something which lends moral conscience and social ideals an external, punitive quality (Adorno et al., 2019: 754-762). Furthermore, there is a tendency to transfer of idealisation and affection onto social leaders, who are expected to protect the helpless ego from competitive pressures and social crisis. Finally, the weakened ego of the authoritarian personality is corroded by the increasingly direct socialisation of the individual into conformist subjectivity by cultural industries and bureaucratic apparatuses, which “stamp variegated social processes” onto individual persons, recruiting them to “psychological classes” (Adorno et al., 2019: 757). To bring the empirical findings of the study into line with this philosophical anthropology, Adorno and cothinkers generate the category of the “pseudo-conservative,” a figure who, although not a manifest authoritarian, is described as having superficial non-authoritarian attitudes, combined with the same sado-masochistic resolution of the Oedipus Complex as the authoritarian personality (Adorno et al., 2019: 676). In short, not only does fascism represent the scarcely concealed totalitarian potentials of state capitalism, under conditions of the

decline of liberalism, but also, the authoritarian personality represents a pathological character structure just hidden beneath the surface of the modern individual.

PSYCHODYNAMIC ORIGINS OF THE RESEARCH PROGRAM

Adorno's and Horkheimer's philosophical anthropology, although it is framed in Freudian terms, actually trails psychodynamic resonances without meaningful theoretical correspondence to the psychoanalytic concepts that describe disturbances of equilibrium. It is a disease-like latency/activation model that is perhaps best grasped, not as a fully-formulated social theory of the emergence of authoritarian politics within modern societies, but in terms of its polemical intentions. Rhetorically speaking, Adorno's articulation of the authoritarian personality is *satiric*—"personality patterns that have been dismissed as 'pathological' ... have ... turned out to be but exaggerations of what was almost universal"—where satire is understood as the exhibition of a ridiculous exaggeration as a means of bringing to light hitherto unseen problems with the norm. What is ridiculous about the exaggeration is not the authoritarian personality, but the desperate theoretical contortions required to assimilate the "pseudo-conservative" majority to the pathological group. This might well have the salutary satirical effect of alerting the reader to the prevalence of uncritical attitudes towards social authorities. But its unfortunate theoretical effect is that it substitutes an unsubstantiated answer—"they are latent authoritarians"—for a real research question—"how do fascist demagogues recruit popular masses to authoritarian ideologies?"

In this context, it is important to notice that the main finding of the survey of working-class and middle-class social attitudes in Germany in the early 1930s, conducted under the auspices of the Institute for Social Research, was emphatically not that the majority of the population was latently authoritarian. Instead, what the (belated) analysis of the empirical research indicated was that significant ambivalence towards authoritarian values existed amongst blue-collar workers and white-collar employees (Fromm, 1984: 228). According to Fromm, the "most important result" of the inquiry was that only about 15% of the leftwing workers held radical attitudes consistent with their political affiliations—the rest seemed to have adapted themselves to capitalism, holding leftwing views as consolatory resentments or as passive expectations (Fromm, 1984: 229-230). Additionally, some 19% of leftwing respondents and 15% of centrist respondents showed an "unreliable" combination of authoritarianism with rebelliousness, consistent with their eventual embrace of the contradictory doctrine of "national socialism" (Fromm, 1984: 43). We might say now that under conditions where fascism did not need to win a genuine majority, this suggests a sufficiently large, ready constituency of authoritarian followers, to supplement the authoritarian personalities of the fascist cadres. The problem at the time was that the categories of the initial study were derived from political allegiances, not from social characterology, so that no meaningful conclusions could be drawn about the psychological mechanisms governing the swing from social democracy to national socialism (Wiggershaus, 1994: 172).

To respond to this question, between 1929 and 1938, Erich Fromm developed a social psychology centred on the notion of social character, grasped as a libidinal structure socialised into the personality, consisting of social-strata-specific forms of ego maturity, defense mechanisms, capacities for sublimation and orientations to authority. In the informal division of labour within the early Frankfurt School, Fromm (supplemented by leftwing analysts such as Otto Fenichel) was mainly responsible for the critical integration of Freudian psychoanalysis with historical materialism (Jacoby, 1986: 108-109; Dahmer, 1982: 216-262). In two extended articles for the journal of the Institute for Social Research, Fromm detailed an approach that was to have a significant influence within the Frankfurt School's adoption of Freudo-Marxism (Fromm, 1991b; Fromm, 1991c). Fromm's historicisation of psychoanalytic categories involved a critique of Freud's naturalisation of the specifically bourgeois form of the family institution (together with considerable sympathy for feminist perspectives) (Fromm, 1991d). Rejecting the late development of an opposition between erotic instincts and the death drive, Fromm argued for retaining the opposition between the relative fixity of the survival instincts and the relative plasticity of the libidinal drives. This opposition potentially explained how the repression of sexuality could provide the surplus energy necessary for civilizational advances, at the cost of an aggravation and localisation of the Oedipus Complex. However, Fromm argued, the "renunciation of instinctual satisfactions" demanded for the production of an increasing social surplus product was not evenly distributed within the division of labour. Instead, in line with Freud's discussion of the "discontent with civilization," material inequalities, springing from property structures, determined that the labouring classes had fierce demands imposed on them, which often led to resentment of authority (Fromm, 1991b).

Fromm's studies of Christianity had already indicated that the political defeat of the demand for a relaxation of excessive repression had led to the intensified idealisation of authority, that is, to an identification with divine authority

against terrestrial authority, supported by the fantasy of redemption (Fromm, 1955: 46-47). In the modern context, amongst the German popular classes, the psyche as a whole had become increasingly reliant on the superego for equilibrium, with the result that the weakened, or immature, ego, could not control instinctual impulses successfully without resorting to repression, supported by strong feelings of guilt (Fromm, 1991c: 164). In Fromm's terminology, the ego structure of the dominated classes displayed a distinctly submissive relation to authority figures, based on its masochistic relation to a punitive, and morally primitive, because highly conventional, superego (Fromm, 1991c: 169). Nonetheless, Fromm insisted that this basic situation was susceptible to considerable individual variation (based on individual instinctual endowment and the particularities of the parental figures) and was highly differentiated across distinct social strata, because of the varying demands placed on socio-economic groups (Fromm, 1991c: 174). Accordingly, the notion of social character, presented in the 1932 articles, is to be completed by the historical analysis of the evolution of family structures in the division of labour, as well as of the differentiation of social strata within different modes of production.

FASCISM AND ANXIETY: THE REGRESSION HYPOTHESIS

Fromm's theoretical section of *Studies on Authority and the Family* (1936) presents his discovery of the "authoritarian masochistic character" (Fromm, 1963: 110-137), from the empirical research reported in *The Working Class in Weimar Germany* [*Arbeiter und Angestellte am Vorabend des Dritten Reichs*] (Fromm, 1984), and the theoretical considerations of the 1932 papers. It is crucial to realize that although the referent of the title *Working Class* is actually "workers and employees," invoking a distinction between the salaried white-collar employees and the waged, blue-collar workers, the object of *Studies in Authority and the Family* was "the bourgeois family" (Horkheimer, 1963b: ix). Indeed, *Studies* actually included surveys of small business people and independent tradespersons, particularly in its second part (post-1933), assembled from results from other countries in Western Europe (Horkheimer, 1963a: 229-469). Nonetheless, Fromm's focus is not particularly on the development of a stratification map of the social psychology of the labouring classes, but rather, on the thesis that a historically particular form of the family inculcates a specific vulnerability to authoritarianism into the popular masses.

Although directly after this study, Fromm reconsidered elements of his Freudianism, in *Studies*, the regression hypothesis of a specific immaturity in the relation to authority is presented in terms of libido theory and the normative model of the Oedipus Complex. Fromm maintains that "a particular situation of authority exists in the father-son relationship in the typical petty-bourgeois family structure: the father is feared, and he is obeyed without contradiction or hesitation—this generates an ambivalent mixture of awe and hate towards the father" (Fromm, 1963: 77). Regarding the superego as an agency that represents social coercion and cultural prohibition in the psyche, Fromm proposes that "through identification with this kind of father, the superego becomes [a representative of external coercion] that is draped with the command attributes of morality and potency" (Fromm, 1963: 85). Fromm's depth-psychological explanation of the implications of this process of formation of the superego invokes the three stages of the Oedipus Complex (Fromm, 1963: 93-109). Direct introjection of paternal command, combined with ambivalence towards the father (stage I), is succeeded by identification with the father's potency and morality [*Moralität und Macht*] (stage II). This installs the superego within the psyche as a representation of (socially-conformist) conscience, at the cost of repression of the ambivalence towards the father. Finally, the traversal of the Oedipus Complex happens (or not!) through the ego gaining rational control over impulses, which results in the dissolution of both the superego and ambivalence (stage III). Fromm associates this with both reflexive morality and revolutionary politics (Fromm, 1963: 119 fn111). According to Fromm, in the authoritarian context of middle-class socialisation, the typical result is a social character that is arrested at stage II of the oedipal crisis and that can easily regress to the infantile stage I of the oedipal drama, something whose implications are clearly exhibited in the "sado-masochistic character" of the authoritarian personality (Fromm, 1963: 110-137).

Following Freud's essay on "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego," Fromm argues that the process of the formation of the superego can flow backwards, especially when the traversal of the Oedipus Complex is incomplete, as is the case, Fromm thinks, in the socially-normative family type. The father-like leader figure, potent bearer of the ideal, usurps the role of the individual's superego, converting the individual into a "soldier" before this "officer"—*provided* that "external force dictates the docility of the crowd/masses" (Fromm, 1963: 86). This is by no means a fixed and final result: "the preservation of the superego depends on the reinforcement, again and again, of the internalisation of external coercion," because "the dynamically decisive element in the formation of the superego is the maintenance of the ego's fear of social

sanctions” (Fromm, 1963: 88). Accordingly, a climate of anxiety is a necessary condition for the regression of the individual from a superego-formative identification with potent and idealised authority, to the infantile situation of a direct introjection of tyrannical external authority, through the internalisation of the commands of the (hated and loved) leader (Fromm, 1963: 88).

The problem with this position emerges after Fromm’s subsequent break with orthodox Freudianism and its exclusive reliance on an instinctual model to explain social psychology (Fromm, 1991a). Fromm’s explanation of the drift into authoritarianism depends on forms of realistic fear that have nothing to do with libidinally-generated anxiety; yet, according to the model, authoritarianism is the result of a resurgence of the oedipal crisis that pivots on libidinal repression. In *Escape from Freedom* (1941), Fromm effectively proposes a division of labour between socially-conditioned survival instincts and socially-oriented libidinal dynamics, in which “ontological insecurity” overwhelms learnt responses to coping with reality, but the individual responds to “social helplessness” by turning to beloved (and resented) authority figures.

“[T]he essential nucleus of the character structure of most members of a group has developed as the result of the basic life experiences and mode of life common to that group” (Fromm, 1994: 276), Fromm proposes. The failure of social structures to provide support for different stages of learning and development results in stagnation at a given level of achievement. In particular, the transition from familial security to social uncertainty is fraught with danger because of the lack of support structures, which entails a thesis on the developmental experience and coping mechanisms of different social strata. When these mechanisms of coping with reality are exhausted by circumstances, when “the economic social and political conditions . . . do not offer a basis for the realization of individuality . . . while at the same time, people have lost those ties which gave them security, this lag makes freedom an unbearable burden”. A situation arises in which “powerful tendencies arise to escape from this kind of freedom into submission, or some kind of relationship of man to the world which promises relief from uncertainty, even if it deprives the individual of his freedom” (Fromm, 1994: 36-37).

Fromm then discusses four main “mechanisms of escape,” intended to connect the character-dynamic theory with personality-type research undertaken in the 1930s. In general, the result is “automaton conformity,” the relinquishment of individuality through compulsive actions that control panic at the expense of resigning from the effort to rationally control impulses and the environment (Fromm, 1994: 158-177). But more sinister mechanisms of escape exist, such as the sado-masochistic dynamics of the authoritarian personality (Fromm, 1994: 122-152), or the proto-psychotic destructive rage that happens when the thwarting of the whole of a life is projected outwards as the will-to-destruction (Fromm, 1994: 153-157).

SADO-MASOCHISTIC CHARACTERS: THE REPRESSION HYPOTHESIS

Horkheimer’s “Authority and the Family,” the theoretical introduction to *Studies on Authority and the Family*, develops a set of anthropological generalities regarding the essentially authoritarian social function of the bourgeois family (Horkheimer, 2002). Its main theoretical sources are Marx’s “1859 Preface” and some sections of Engels’ *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*—Horkheimer restates the productive force determinism of these two texts in terms of “cultural lag,” but delicately avoids naming either thinker (Horkheimer, 2002: 65)—together with seven volumes of Nietzsche’s *Collected Works*. Perhaps surprisingly, given Fromm’s psychoanalytically-inflected contribution to *Studies*, Nietzsche in fact dwarfs all other references, even Hegel, with Freud relegated to the dustbin of idealism in his first, last, and only citation (Horkheimer, 2002: 56). In light of this, the thesis on the latently sado-masochistic personality structure characteristic of the bourgeois epoch is probably better described as a “suppression” hypothesis, rather than repression in the Freudian sense. But I have kept the psychoanalytic terminology because in subsequent work, Horkheimer adopts this terminology, albeit without substantive alteration of the Nietzschean concept.

The first part of Horkheimer’s essay develops the argument that bourgeois liberty centres on the contradictions of economic freedom under conditions of private property and the wage system, so that the rationalistic anti-authoritarianism of the Enlightenment quickly finds its limits in the reified authority of the “second nature” of economic facts, themselves based on domination. “Nietzsche more than anyone else saw what underlies social relationships,” Horkheimer maintains: “The psychic apparatus of members of a class society in so far as they do not belong to the nucleus of privileged people, serves in large measure only to interiorize or at least to rationalize and supplement physical coercion” (Horkheimer, 2002: 56). The only impact of the Enlightenment on domination was the camouflaging of authoritarianism: “the compulsion

upon the masses to submit to killing labour was rationalized into a moral imperative" (Horkheimer, 2002: 83), while "submission to the categorical imperative of [social] duty has been from the beginning a conscious goal of the bourgeois family" (Horkheimer, 2002: 99).

Accordingly, the second part of the essay proposes that the authority of economics and labour discipline, especially submission to management, is inculcated especially through familial socialisation: an education in obedience is the residual social function of an otherwise vanishing household unit (Horkheimer, 2002: 101, 102). The agent of this blind submission to external authority, ratified in law, is the father, whose position unites the idea that "might makes right" with his privileged status as the familial breadwinner (Horkheimer, 2002: 100, 105). Adaptation to this situation is a "first rate schooling in the authority behaviour specific to this form of society" (Horkheimer, 2002: 107), perhaps rationalised by the conscious calculation that "father has all the money," and reinforced by parental discipline and female subordination (Horkheimer, 2002: 114).

Horkheimer does passingly entertain the possibility that paternal authoritarianism might be undermined by (if not by rational socialisation and schooling), proletarianisation and unemployment, women's entry into work, or filial rebellion (Horkheimer, 2002: 123-124). But his inclination is to save the hypothesis by counter-assertion: "Among the lower classes ... where pressure on the father is transmuted into pressure on his children, the result has been directly to increase, along with cruelty, the masochistic inclination to surrender one's will to any leader whatsoever" (Horkheimer, 2002: 110). Presumably, this casts Fromm's contribution in the role of providing evidence for this claim.

Meanwhile, Horkheimer reaches a strikingly global conclusion: "As long as there is no decisive change in the basic structure of social life and in the modern culture which rests on that structure, the family will continue to exercise its indispensable function of producing specific, authority-oriented types of character" (Horkheimer, 2002: 112). That conclusion is supported alongside "Authority and the Family," in Horkheimer's extended sketch for an anthropology of the sadomasochistic character of the bourgeois individual, "Egoism and Freedom Movements: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Era" (1936) (Horkheimer, 1993). Here, in work prepared at the same time as the introduction to *Studies* but published in the Institute's journal, the surprised reader discovers that Freud, after all, provides "significant insight" into the problem of authoritarianism. "The transformation of psychic energies that takes place in the process of internalization," Horkheimer states, "cannot be understood today without the psychoanalytical perspective" (Horkheimer, 1993: 105). However, aside from the description of the masses as "sadomasochistic," the contribution of psychoanalysis is restricted to the claim that "social prohibitions, under the given familiar and general social conditions, are suited for arresting people's instinctual development at a sadistic level, or reverting them back to this level" (Horkheimer, 1993: 105).

In general, the line of the essay is the same as that in *Studies*: Horkheimer proposes to derive the psychodynamics of bourgeois subjectivity from the contradictions of capitalism (between formal freedom and substantive exploitation), the class struggles of the bourgeoisie (against both aristocracy and the proletariat), and the rhetoric of bourgeois revolutionaries. The social structure of capitalist society, combined with its history of revolutionary movements that are transformed into conduits of popular submission, imposes a masochistic version of bourgeois subjectivity on the labouring classes.

In Horkheimer's contributions, then, there is a distinct tendency towards the reification of the psychodynamic underpinnings of the Frankfurt School position into a fixed relation between the "bourgeois character," capitalist society and authoritarian potentials. Furthermore, Horkheimer's underlying project of a "philosophical anthropology of the bourgeois era," was intended to demonstrate that liberal capitalism's contradiction between formal freedom and substantive unfreedom was psychologically supported by strong repression. That is characterised by a strong renunciation of instinctual satisfactions, supported by superego formations that foster guilt and asceticism, together with repressed needs whose release is gained, not by rebellion, but by symptomatic hostility towards designated out-groups. In short, in Horkheimer's philosophical anthropology, Fromm's "sadomasochistic character," a personality which is subservient to authority but sadistic in the enforcement of social norms, becomes increasingly generalised. The chapters on anti-Semitism and morality in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* present the final state of this theory, while Adorno goes on to seek corroboration of the thesis in his contribution to *The Authoritarian Personality*.

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